He couldn't say he had been very sorry to find the corpse of Frank Kennedy. There hadn't been an ounce of guilt in his body when he smiled into the darkness, picking up the still-warm body to carry it over his shoulder. It had to be taken somewhere, and there was only one alibi he could think of.

The irony of that night wasn't lost on Rhett Butler. The Old Guard would be humiliated to know that a scalawag and former food speculator like him had come to their rescue by insinuating that such fine gentlemen frequented a whore house. And he would shock them even more if his hopes for the Widow Kennedy went as he planned.

Yes, even while toting the corpse of her husband, he had plans for Scarlett. She had driven him crazy since the war. No, since before. The moment he saw her at Twelve Oaks he had wanted her – and after her unladylike display in the library, he'd wanted her more. More than any Southern belle he had ever met, perhaps even more than any whore he had met. After the war he had been prepared to make his offer to her; he thought there was no way her precious Tara had been spared after the battling around Jonesboro. He spent eight months in the Confederate army, fighting
starvation and dysentery and a countless number of other discomforts, focusing on exactly what he would say to Scarlett Hamilton when she was in his sights again. After Appomattox he had come back to Atlanta in the dark of night, hoping to avoid arrest while he sought any information he could obtain from her Aunt Pittypat.

Only to find her married to someone who Rhett would've considered half a man even before the war started.

It wasn't that Frank Kennedy terrible. He was just terrible for Scarlett. Rhett had done dealings with people he respected far less than Mr. Kennedy, but he had never been forced to think of them bedding such a woman. To see her pregnant made him furious. He had idly wondered what she was thinking, marrying a child and then an old fool. Never mind that Frank Kennedy was probably only seven or eight years older than him – compared to Scarlett he was an old man.

Rhett found it impossible not to reflect on Scarlett O'Hara's love life as he made his way over to Miss Pitty's home on Peachtree Street. How often he had walked this very path, musing about the dear Widow Hamilton's bedroom manners?

The first time he had ever seen her it was one of the first thoughts to cross his mind. She had been chatting idly on the porch at Twelve Oaks, casually complimenting and enticing the local boys. But he had noticed something else: outside of all her pretenses of leisure, her bright eyes were darting around wildly, as though looking for someone or something. Rhett had a respect for people who could fool others, as she was clearly doing with all of the young men and perhaps even some of the women. He could not take his eyes off of her, and when she finally made contact with him, he could see the vain delight she took in being so appraised, as well as the annoyance that flashed momentarily – she obviously knew that she should not take pleasure in the roving eye of an older man. Later, in the afternoon, he had his first conversation with her after overhearing that ridiculous clandestine declaration of love. The girl was so overcome with passion that she had clearly forgotten every bit of genteel upbringing she had received in her life. That piqued Rhett's interest even more. He loved a smooth bargainer, but he was more interested in the enthusiasm and zeal for life that this young girl could not contain. And he could not help but enjoy taunting her a bit, letting her know that he admired her, while she snapped back in that irritating and barely-cultured north Georgia accent.

But then – to discover that she had married Charles Hamilton! He understood her motive; she was clearly trying to make the inestimable Ashley Wilkes jealous, and foolishly accepted the first offer she had received – and one so close to the new Mrs. Wilkes, at that. He had witnessed Scarlett's charming flirtation with Charles on the stair before the barbecue, and knew that the poor boy was overwhelmed by her coquetry, and took every false utterance from her devilish lips as an absolute truth. He was relieved to learn she had chosen such a child for her husband – even more to hear she'd lost him in the war. The notion of her sleeping with Charles Hamilton was enough to make him laugh. Young Mr. Hamilton could have used a trip or two to a bordello before marriage – but these northern Georgia families were too uptight to understand the life of a gentleman. So this young woman had been bedded by someone with less experience than her in the realm of affections. But any experience (even the awkward fumbling of children) was better for her than none. And better for him. Widows were far easier to deal with than virgins.

But Scarlett was a widow like none he had ever met before. The 'bloom' that writers spoke of in this lovely young girl had certainly not been worn off by war and grief. He had studied her for some time at the Atlanta bazaar before approaching, searching to see if she was the same girl he had thought she was. Her waspish retorts when he mentioned that fateful barbecue and the conversation in the library telegraphed to him that she was not different in the least, and that she still felt that he "wasn't fit to wipe the boots" of Ashley Wilkes. So even though he knew she nursed the ridiculous affection for the gallant young (and married) man, he could not resist
pursuing.

He thought that getting her to defy every custom for Atlanta's married and widowed women might bring her a step closer to his bed, but it never worked that way. Unlike most women, she was too stubborn to let his conversation win her over. He knew she was fond of him. But he also knew that her foolish sensibilities would set her into a rage when he offered her the chance to be his mistress. In fact, that delicious tantrum alone made the offer worthwhile, even while not getting his preferred outcome. There was little he loved more than riling up the young widow, and making advances at her was the safe way to do it.

The unsafe way was to criticize her affection for Ashley Wilkes.

Ashley Wilkes.

If he heard the name today he suspected he would quite easily strangle her.

Her love of Mr. Wilkes was as ridiculous as her vanity. At first he assumed it would go away over time – but after Mr. Wilkes had a Christmas furlough, he could see that faraway, dreamy expression returning to her face – as though she were reliving a precious moment. Ashley himself had said at Twelve Oaks that he had given her no reason to believe he loved her or would want to marry her, so Rhett had to assume that something physical had transpired between them. Nothing significant, of course; Wilkes was a gentleman, after all. When Rhett asked Scarlett outright, she answered with her stubborn, stony silence and then promptly flounced out of his life again.

He hated to imagine what her life was like with only the kisses of sloppy country men and genteel bookish sorts. He had known that she needed more than that – she needed something Ashley Wilkes could never offer. And he made the proposition a second time in the middle of the night as they made their way to her beloved Tara. He would have taken her right there in the middle of the road, had she been agreeable to it. He had even professed his love – and was thankful when he saw that her little mind was still trying to grasp the fact that he was leaving rather than calculating a way to use his own affection against him. Instead he stole a kiss – a damn nice kiss, at that – and joined the army. And in doing so, he confirmed his very first thought about Scarlett O'Hara: he needed to have her. He knew they were mentally matched, for all her lack of proper education. But at that point he had also confirmed their physical chemistry, and it wasn't something he would stop thinking about during his time with the Confederate army.

Now, as he drove toward the house at the end of the street, he understood that this was a woman who would demand the ultimate sacrifices of anyone who wanted her. She had married twice already – out of spite and necessity. She clearly did not attach affection to marriage; would she consider marrying for love? Security would be a better offer. He found it strange to believe he was considering such a drastic measure.

Pittypat Hamilton was reluctant to let him in. He had always had to fight against her, but usually the right amount of charm worked wonders. Still, requesting to see Scarlett only hours after her late husband's funeral was obviously a bit much for the nervous older woman.

"I think she will see me," he insisted. "Please tell her I am going away tomorrow and may be gone some time. It's very important." He mind was working quickly, trying to think of any excuse Miss Pitty would accept. Business with Scarlett? Business with Frank?

He didn't have to worry. Scarlett appeared in the upstairs hall, leaning over the banister. "I'll be down terrectly, Rhett," she called. He noticed her lurching step back into her room and smiled. The widow was keeping herself occupied in the most interesting way, it seemed.

Miss Pitty pattered on about the funeral, insinuating that she wanted to know why he hadn't come,
but Rhett brushed her off with kind but distracted words, apologizing for his not attending and for
his disturbing the mourning household. He wouldn't remember the words ten seconds later, he
was so preoccupied with the idea of what he was planning to do.

When Scarlett came downstairs – much more gracefully than her earlier wobbly steps on the
landing led him to believe possible – he tried to usher her into the parlor, but she resisted.

"No!" she cried, stepping back with an expression of horror. Her eyes were locked on the folding
doors and her mouth was turned into a frown of almost revulsion.

Ah, of course. Frank Kennedy was likely still in there.

"Do use the library," Miss Pittypat offered, then made excuses to be elsewhere. She was
obviously still fretting about Rhett's presence, but he didn't care. His mind was elsewhere,
recalling another love scene in a different library.

"What business did you and Frank have?" Scarlett asked abruptly. She clearly wasn't in the mood
to talk about her late husband.

Rhett leaned close to her, whispering, "None at all. I just wanted to get Miss Pitty out of the way."
Leaning over her, the scent of inexpensive cologne – and something stronger – confirmed his
suspicions. Brandy, he presumed. He proceeded to warn her that covering the scent with cologne
didn't work, and she naturally exclaimed innocence of his accusation as she delicately stumbled a
step away from him.

"Well, what if I have?" she asked waspishly. Her green eyes were flashing, reminding him of their
dance at the bazaar, when she complained of his holding her so tightly. "Is it any of your
business?"

"The soul of courtesy, even in the depths of sorrow," he replied mockingly. "Don't drink alone,
Scarlett. People always find it out and it ruins the reputation. And besides, it's a bad business, this
drinking alone." Her face seemed to crumple – she was so distraught he knew she wasn't listening.
He let down the sardonic façade. "What's the matter, honey? May I close the doors?"

He closed them without her consent, knowing that it would drive the entire house crazy – but he
didn't care. He had seen Scarlett upset before, but nothing quite like this, and she would not open
up if anyone could hear her. He returned to her side, and his heart nearly ached when she lifted
her tormented eyes to meet his. "Can't you tell me? It's more than just old Frank leaving you? Do
you need money?"

Damn it, he had meant to set aside the money offer as his ace in the hole!

"Money? God, no!" she cried, appalled. "Oh, Rhett, I'm so afraid."

He'd never known her to be afraid of anything. Well, she had been worried about going home to
Tara – but he knew she would have done it whether he'd been there to help or not. He had then
known that nothing could get between Scarlett and her home, even General Sherman himself.
And she had since told him everything she had lived through from the time of the war. No, this
woman was afraid of nothing.

She babbled almost incoherently about going to hell, and feeling new-found remorse from her
theft of Frank Kennedy from her younger sister. Had she been less upset he would have teased her
and laughed at her, but he could see that this was no laughing matter for Scarlett. He listened
patiently as she spoke of her mother, and how she'd certainly be ashamed of her behavior. She
wrung her hands and wiped the stream of tears off her cheeks with the backs of her hands – a
childish gesture owing to her lack of a handkerchief.

"I did try so hard to be nice to people and kind to Frank, but then the nightmare would come back and scare me so bad I'd want to rush out and just grab money away from people, whether it was mine or not," she said through sobs and hiccoughs. She was digging her nails painfully into his hand, she was clutching him so hard.

"What nightmare?" It was the first he'd ever heard of it.

Her eyes grew haunted as she retold the dream. He'd dealt with nightmares before – his ward in New Orleans suffered from them as a toddler, as did Rhett himself long ago. Hers stemmed from the war, naturally, and he gave her a handkerchief to wipe away her tears. Frank Kennedy should have known how to comfort her, how to help her through these kinds of terrors. What kind of inhuman creature had he been? She needed someone who could ease her mind, soothe her when she woke in the night. Rhett comforted her over the dream, squeezing her frantic hands and petting her soft hair, then he brought it back to the issue of her late husband.

"Let's get to the bottom of this," he said. "You say if you had to do it over again, you'd do it differently. But would you? Think now, would you?"

He and Scarlett haggled over the details until he reached his point: "If you didn't have this silly idea that you were damned to hell fire eternal, you'd think you were well rid of Frank."

Guilt flashed over her face, and he could tell it was guilt from hearing the truth, not from her actions. She was glad to be rid of Frank, and that gave him hope. Getting a woman who was still grieving – even mourning Frank as a friend – would be much more difficult than courting someone who was partially happy to be rid of the burden of her husband.

They continued to bicker over the intentions of God and the root of Scarlett's guilt.

"Oh, Rhett, you are joking and I thought you were going to be nice!"

He smirked. "I am being nice – for me. Scarlett, darling, you are tipsy. That's what's the matter with you." He reveled in seeing her eyes flash again as she protested. But he decided to change the subject before she began to cry again – the alcohol definitely had her worse for the wear, and he had no qualms about not waiting until she was sober to address the subject at the forefront of his mind.

"What's your news?" she asked, after he dangled the notion before her like a pretty new bonnet or piece of jewelry.

"My news is this," he began with a grin, hoping to mask his anxiety. "I still want you more than any woman I've ever seen and now that Frank is gone, I thought you'd be interested in knowing."

She pulled her hands away and leaped to her feet, and at once he realized his mistake. He had meant it as an honest proposal, but for once smooth words had the better of Rhett Butler. They did not come out as intended.

"I – you are the most ill-bred man in the world, coming here at this time of all times with your filthy – I should have known you'd never change. And Frank hardly cold! If you had any decency – Will you leave this –"

"Do be quiet," he interrupted, "or you'll have Miss Pittypat down here in a minute."

She calmed down a fraction; apparently his offer wasn't as churlish as to warrant needing a chaperone to help throw him out of the house. He smiled and took her hands in his. "I'm afraid
you miss my point." She began to protest again, but he continued. "I'm asking you to marry me. Would you be convinced if I kneeled down?" He was loath to do it – he never liked the part of the proper Southern gentleman – but he would do it to satisfy her sensibilities.

"Oh." She sat down hard next to him, the wind completely blown from her sails. Her mouth was open slightly, her eyes wide as she was no doubt recalling their previous conversations about his views on marriage. A slow flush crept into her cheeks; something about the offer pleased her. Before he got too confident, he realized it was probably her vanity.

He pushed onward. "I always intended on having you, Scarlett, since that first day I saw you at Twelve Oaks when you threw that vase and swore and proved that you weren't a lady. I always intended on having you one way or another. But as you and Frank have made a little money, I know you'll never been driven to me again with any interesting propositions of loans and collaterals. So I see I'll have to marry you."

"Rhett Butler, is this one of your vile jokes?" Her eyes met his, and disbelief was etched on her face.

She honestly thought he would joke about marriage? He would taunt and tease her about many things, but never about wanting her. "I bare my soul and you are suspicious! No, Scarlett, this is a bona fide honorable declaration. I admit that it's not in the best of taste, coming at this time, but I have a very good excuse for my lack of breeding. I'm going away tomorrow for a long time and I fear that if I wait till I return you'll have married some one else with a little money. So, I thought, why not me and my money? Really, Scarlett, I can't go all my life, waiting to catch you between husbands."

It had been said – now he just needed her response. He tried to ignore his racing pulse, watching her carefully as subtle expressions washed over her delicate face. Would she refuse him? She searched his face for a long moment, trying to see if his offer was in earnest. He could practically see the thoughts entering and leaving her mind as her eyes darted wildly about the room. She was flustered when she finally brought her eyes back to his, and he his hands trembled slightly, awaiting her reply.

"I – I shall never marry again."

Nonsense. "Oh, yes, you will," he replied. "You were born to be married. Why not me?" He could not fathom her wasting that hunger and fire that he saw in her eyes on the frivolous pursuit of widowed domesticity. Or Ashley Wilkes.

"But Rhett, I – I don't love you."

He was torn between the temptations of laughing outright and strangling her. "That should be no drawback," he said, trying keeping his voice level. "I don't recall that love was prominent in your other two ventures."

"Oh, how can you?" she cried. "You know I was fond of Frank!"

He raised one eyebrow, but did not challenge the sentiment. He, in fact, listened quite attentively as Scarlett again declared that she would never marry again. "But, my poor child," he began, "you've never really been married. How can you know? I'll admit you've had bad luck – once for spite and once for money. Did you ever think of marrying – just for the fun of it?"

"Fun!" She scoffed. "Don't talk like a fool. There's no fun in being married."

Spoken like a little girl who'd never enjoyed a romp in the bedroom. He snickered. "Why not?"
"It's fun for men – though God knows why. I never could understand it."

Rhett, again, had to choke back a laugh. He had every intention of making her understand it. And often.

Scarlett continued: "But all a woman gets out of it is something to eat and a lot of work and having to put up with a man's foolishness – and a baby every year."

Rhett could no longer contain his laughter. He loved her frankness, though he was certain that the brandy was assisting in this open and honest conversation. "I said you'd had bad luck and what you've just said proves it. You've been married to a boy and an old man. And into the bargain I'll bet your mother told you that women must bear 'these things' because of the compensating joys of motherhood. Well, that's all wrong. Why not try marrying a fine young man who has a bad reputation and a way with women? It'll be fun." He was sorely tempted to let her try it out right then.

She protested the vulgarity of the conversation, and he wagered that she'd never had a discussion about marital relations with either Charles or Frank. She scowled in response, making him want to continue the conversation all the more.

"Name the day, Scarlett," he insisted, and then asked what the "decent interval" for a widow to remarry would be.

"I haven't said I'd marry you," she insisted, hiding behind those damned Southern manners. "It isn't decent to even talk of such things at such a time."

"I've told you why I'm talking of them," he said. "I'm going away tomorrow and I'm too ardent a lover to restrain my passion any longer. But perhaps I've been too precipitate in my wooing." He slid off the sofa and onto both knees, placing a hand over his heart in a mockery of proposals. He barely acknowledged how his heart was thumping; he hoped he could hide it from Scarlett.

"Forgive me for startling you with the impetuosity of my sentiments, my dear Scarlett – I mean, my dear Mrs. Kennedy. It cannot have escaped your notice that for some time past the friendship I have had in my heart for you has ripened into a deeper feeling, a feeling more beautiful, more pure, more sacred. Dare I name it? Ah! It is love which makes me so bold!"

"Do get up," she scowled, making excuses to entreat him to stop.

He smiled, pleased to see that in jest, aspects of the truth could be stated and she would overlook it. "Come, Scarlett, you are no child, no schoolgirl to put me off with foolish excuses about decency and so forth. Say you'll marry me when I come back, or before God, I won't go. I'll stay around here and play a guitar under your window every night and sing at the top of my voice and compromise you, so you'll have to marry me to save your reputation."

"Rhett, do be sensible. I don't want to marry anybody." Her shoulders slumped slightly; he suspected he was wearing her down, but knew how quickly one word could strengthen her resolve.

He gazed at her, all playfulness gone. She wasn't just playing the part of the belle of Clayton County. He was almost afraid to hear what was keeping her from accepting his offer. "You aren't telling me the real reason. It can't be girlish timidity. What is it?"

She didn't answer. He watched as she slipped into herself, lost in thought. Her eyes grew wide and misty, and her lips curved into a sweet and delicate smile. He'd never seen her face looking so soft and tender.
It was that God damned Ashley Wilkes.

"Scarlett O'Hara, you're a fool." He wanted to leave. He took a step toward the door, but instead of walking past her he took her into his arms and bent her head gently across his arm so he could kiss her. Her lips were as soft as he'd remembered, the scent of her skin mingled with cheap cologne drove him crazy. He deepened the kiss as she clung to him, and parted her lips. She tasted of brandy, as well as the harsh tang of the cologne she'd apparently gargled in a lame effort to cover up her drinking. And by God, she kissed him back as if tomorrow wouldn't come.

"Stop – please, I'm faint," she whispered against his lips, trying to turn away.

"I want to make you faint," he murmured, his arms trembling in his effort to keep his expression blank. He could tell by her wide eyes that his effort was failing. "I will make you faint. None of the fools you've known have kissed you like this – have they? Your precious Charles or Frank or your stupid Ashley – " The name tore from his throat violently.

"Please –" she whispered.

"I said your stupid Ashley," he growled, venom filling his voice as he said the hated name. "Gentlemen all – what do they know about women? What did they know about you? I know you." He brought his lips down to hers again. He could feel her shaking in his arms, but he could also feel her lips moving against his, her desire possibly even matching his. "Say yes!" He pulled away enough to look her squarely in the eyes. "Say yes, damn you, or –"

"Yes," she whispered. Her face was calm and serene as she gazed back at him, but her eyes were wide, almost in surprise at hearing the agreement.

He moved to kiss her again, but stopped. They stood quite still, Scarlett still in his arms. Rhett calmed himself, and carefully withdrew his arms and stepped away. Suddenly her wondered if perhaps the powers of persuasion and alcohol weren't the most honorable way of obtaining her after all. "You meant it? You don't want to take it back?"

"No."

"It's not just because I've – what is the phrase? – 'swept you off your feet' by my – er – ardor?"

She wouldn't meet his eyes, so he placed his hand under her chin and lifted her face. "I told you once that I could stand anything from you except a lie. And now I want the truth. Just why did you say yes?" His own emotions were driving him mad. Now that he had what he wanted, he wanted to make sure it was genuine.

She kept her eyes down, showing the most demure expression he'd ever seen on her face. He had the feeling this was more than just the girlish act she was prone to playing. "Look at me. Is it my money?"

"Why, Rhett! What a question!"

It was his money. But was there more? "Look up and don't try to sweet talk me. I'm not Charles or Frank or any of the County boys to be taken in by your fluttering lids. Is it my money?"

"Well – yes, a part."

"A part?" Rhett drew in his breath and waited eagerly to hear what the other parts might be. Had she given up on Ashley – but no, that was too much to hope for. She'd certainly not stopped loving the fool, he knew that much. But if even a part of her loved Rhett, that would be enough.
"Well, money does help, you know, Rhett and God knows Frank didn't leave any too much. But then," she paused, and his hopes rose more. "Well, Rhett, we do get on you know. And you are the only man I ever saw who could stand the truth from a woman, and it would be nice having a husband who didn't think me a silly fool and expect me to tell lies – and – well, I am fond of you."

He sighed. "Fond of me?" Those weren't the most flattering words he had hoped to hear this afternoon. Part of him wanted the kind of confession he'd heard at Twelve Oaks years before: "I tell you I love you and I know you must care about me."

She twisted his handkerchief in her hands. "Well, if I said I was madly in love with you, I'd be lying and what's more, you'd know it."

"Sometimes I think you carry your truth telling too far, my pet. Don't you think, even if it was a lie, that it would be appropriate for you to say 'I love you Rhett,' even if you didn't mean it?" He wanted to hear the words – just this once – out of her delicate mouth. He pulled his hands away from her and shoved them into his pockets, balled into fists. It was an insecure stance he had not taken in years. The last time he had stood so petulantly in front of anyone it was his father. And at that time, too, Rhett did not hear the words he had wanted to hear.

"Rhett, it would be a lie, and why should we go through all that foolishness?" She put on her practical, business face. He was not particularly charmed by it just now. "I'm fond of you, like I said. You know how it is. You told me once that you didn't love me, but that was had a lot in common. Both rascals, was the way you –"

"Oh God," Rhett whispered, turning away from her. "To be taken in my own trap!" He remembered that conversation on the porch of this very house, when he had told her that he did not love her. It was only because she had so flippantly said that she could not ever love him.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing," He laughed, recognizing the edge of anger in it. "Name the day, my dear." A thought came to his mind, and kissed her hands gently; she smiled at him. "Did you ever in your novel reading come across the old situation of the disinterested wife falling love with her own husband?"

"You know I don't read novels," she said shortly. She put on her most coquettish face and smiled at him. "Besides, you once said it was the height of bad form for husbands and wives to love each other."

His eyes flashed. "I once said too God damn many things!" He rose to his feet hastily, wishing he could have not spoken of love to Scarlett O'Hara at any time in the past.

"Don't swear," she reprimanded primly.

"You'll have to get used to it and learn to swear, too. You'll have to get used to all my bad habits. That'll be part of the price of being – fond of me and getting your pretty paws on my money."

She flushed visibly when he said "part of the price." But then her face relaxed into her cool business expression again. "Well, don't fly off the handle so, because I didn't lie and make you feel conceited. You aren't in love with me, are you? Why should I be in love with you?"

Rhett sighed, and did the only thing that would keep him safe from her wielding his affection as a weapon. "No, my dear, I'm not in love with you, no more than you are with me, and if I were, you would be the last person I'd ever tell. God help the man who ever really loves you. You'd break his heart, my darling, cruel, destructive little cat who is so careless and confident she doesn't even trouble to sheath her claws." He pulled her to her feet and kissed her roughly, holding nothing
back. His hands ran from her exquisite neck down her tiny torso, finally resting on her alluring hips. His mouth trailed down her throat and down over the black taffeta over her breast.

He would have liked to stay there longer, but she pushed him away suddenly, crying, "You mustn't! How dare you?"

"Your heart's going like a rabbit's," he said with a smirk. "All too fast for mere fondness, I would think, if I were conceited." He fought his rising anger, realizing that she was insulted by such a vulgar display of affection, even for an engaged couple. Vulgarity be damned, he'd never had such an urge to take her right there in the house she'd shared with Frank Kennedy, the house that Charles Hamilton had been raised in. He took a deep breath, willing his ire away. Rhett instead offered her to bring back a ring from England, and was amused at her request for something gaudy and tacky. She was still his Scarlett, and he knew that some things would never change.

He stood to leave, and she followed. "What is the matter? Where are you going?"

"To my rooms to finish packing."

"Oh, but –"

"But what?" he asked with a knowing grin. Despite all her girlish primness, Scarlett clearly wanted to be ravished one more time before he left. He wouldn't give her the satisfaction.

"Nothing. I just hope you have a nice trip."

"Thank you," he said, opening the doors and heading into the hall, She followed, looking bewildered. As he donned his coat and picked up his hat and gloves, she looked as if she wanted to say something, but didn't know where to begin. He was afraid she might suddenly change her mind, so he beat her to saying it. "I'll write you. Let me know if you change your mind."

"Aren't you –"

"Well?" he asked impatiently.

"Aren't you going to kiss me good-by?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Don't you think you've had enough kissing for one evening?" He smiled down at her. He had a feeling he would enjoy life as her husband. "To think of a modest, well-brought-up young woman – Well, I told you it would be fun, didn't I?"

"Oh, you're impossible!" she exclaimed, her pretty little hands balled into fists. "And I don't care if you never come back!" She turned and stomped toward the staircase, her lips in the most alluring of pouts.

"But I will come back," Rhett said with a smile, and he closed the door. He wasn't going to placate her this time. Let her stew in her vanity, and get riled up and angry the way he had just been.

He lightly stepped down the steps and through the yard. He was finally going to have Scarlett O'Hara, and the prospect of marriage wasn't nearly as distasteful as it had once seemed.